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Letter dated 18 July 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sweden and Uruguay, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, hereby share a summary note of the meeting held on 14 June 2017 on women and peace and security in Iraq (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Olof **Skoog**
Ambassador

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
Ambassador

(*Signed*) Elbio **Rosselli**
Ambassador

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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security

Summary of the meeting on Iraq, 14 June 2017

On 14 June, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security held its third meeting on women and peace and security in Iraq. The members received a briefing from the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq and representatives of UNAMI and the United Nations country team.

The meeting was held as the Iraqi security forces, supported by a coalition of more than 60 Member States, were on the brink of defeating Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Mosul in the largest urban battle since the Second World War and was focused on the abuses committed against women and girls, from being used as human shields and executed in public to being abducted, enslaved and sold or relocated to the Syrian Arab Republic, and the overall regression in women's rights and women's empowerment in the cities occupied by ISIL, marked by a rigid enforcement of sex segregation and an increase in early marriage and intimate partner violence. In more than 20 displacement sites surrounding Mosul, women and girls are now vulnerable to sexual harassment, stigmatization and family separation when their husbands and sons are taken into detention centres. More than 90 per cent of camp management committees in camps for internally displaced persons lack female representation.

The participation of women in national reconciliation, especially in the continuing discussions on a national settlement, remains low, despite continued advocacy, ongoing engagement with the gender office of the National Reconciliation Committee and efforts to include young women in youth committees and round tables organized in recent months. Important initiatives, including the five-year parliamentary initiative for community peace in Ninawa, led by female parliamentarians and focused on social peace and community reconciliation, need political backing and financial support. Women's organizations struggle to find space and to influence decision-making in a context dominated by military and religious actors. There are limited opportunities for women within political parties, and the United Nations has expressed concern that the participation of women as voters and candidates in upcoming elections will be low in areas that were occupied by ISIL. In the process of selecting new commissioners for the Independent High Electoral Commission, only seven women have been included in a shortlist of 118 candidates. International partners can assist in the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which continues to lack funding and even a line item in the national budget, by supporting the response and resilience programme for Iraq and joint programmes on security sector reform, preventing violent extremism and reintegration and services for survivors.

During the second official visit to Iraq of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Government showed its political will and commitment to implement the joint communiqué on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence signed in September 2016. Focal points at the federal and regional levels have already been appointed, an

interministerial task force is being formed and the Government has repeatedly acknowledged the need for special efforts and specific legislation for survivors of sexual violence and children born of rape. Following the positive statements by religious leaders in Iraq on the reintegration of survivors of sexual violence and their children, a national conference in July will focus on this issue. The work of several United Nations agencies was highlighted, especially the importance of the United Nations Population Fund specialized mobile teams and hospitals with maternity wings around Mosul, which are aimed at highly vulnerable women as soon as they cross the front line. However, shelters run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to lack the legal coverage required to operate; none are active in southern and central Iraq and only three are operating in the Kurdistan region. The draft family protection act has been under discussion by the Council of Representatives for several years, and the Penal Code still permits "honour" as mitigation for crimes of violence committed against family members. Other issues highlighted included the marked contrast between the positive statements by religious leaders and the lack of acceptance of children born of rape among all communities, the critical need to scale up multisectoral services for survivors and the importance of holding those responsible for enslaving and trafficking women and girls to account. Action that could be taken in that regard included the designation of individuals by the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities and making full use of the mandate of Security Council resolution 2331 (2016) on the links between violent extremism, trafficking and conflict-related sexual violence. In its resolution 2299 (2016), the Council expressed its readiness to sanction individuals or groups for trafficking in persons, the sale of women and girls and forced marriage, among other violations, and made repeated calls for accountability that have not yet been met.

The representative of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, noted that several recommendations highlighted at the previous meeting had been taken forward. United Nations reports and briefings to the Security Council had included stronger information and analysis on women and peace and security, as well as regular updates on the Organization's ongoing efforts, including by its senior leadership, to advocate women's inclusion in decision-making about stabilization, recovery and national reconciliation. The Government had established a new directorate-general on women's empowerment following the abolishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2015, and the capacity of UNAMI had been strengthened by the recruitment of a Senior Women's Protection Adviser, as called for in resolution 2299 (2016). However, it was crucial for the mandate of UNAMI on gender equality issues to be reiterated and reinforced during discussions on its renewal. Elements and recommendations for special consideration were shared with members of the Security Council. They included urging the Government to ensure that it took the lead with regard to the joint communiqué and national action plan and had adequate capacity and leverage and that effective mechanisms existed for civil society to monitor the implementation of those instruments; the provision of increased political, legal and financial support to women's civil society organizations and women's human rights defenders; the promotion of the representation and participation of women in upcoming elections and electoral bodies; and the inclusion of core dedicated capacity on women's protection in the Mission's regular budget. In addition, the international community should demand that United Nations joint programmes on economic recovery, reconciliation, transitional justice, civil documentation, front-line service delivery, deradicalization and prevention of violent extremism, disarmament and reintegration and security

sector reform earmark allocations for the integration of a gender perspective into their work. The United Nations should coordinate the development of a countrywide joint programme on conflict-related sexual violence, building and expanding on current projects by agencies, with the support of international partners.

The United Nations pledged to focus over the coming months on ensuring a leading role of women in reconciliation; reintegration assistance for women survivors; protection from sexual exploitation, harassment, violence and trafficking by security actors and in displacement sites; and continuing to advocate and support the adoption of the draft family protection act with provisions to allow NGOs to operate shelters for women and other vulnerable individuals fleeing violence. In the meantime, a government directive providing similar legal coverage for national NGOs and eliminating access barriers, such as the need for a court order for entry or release into a shelter, was urgently needed.

Lastly, upon the request of the Co-Chairs, the representatives of UNAMI reported on the Mission's current expertise on gender and women's protection, the Mission's gender balance, which stood at 20 per cent, and its coordination mechanisms, which centred around a very active gender task force that included all United Nations agencies in Iraq and sometimes international NGOs. A working group on gender for donors and international partners was being established.

The Co-Chairs expressed thanks to those who had briefed the Informal Expert Group for participating in the meeting and committed themselves to following up on the recommendations, especially in the context of the renewal of the mandate of UNAMI, and to reconvene in 2018.